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SUBJECT: KARZAI AND IEC ANNOUNCE SECOND ROUND

Classified By: Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: At a Palace press conference on October 20 President Hamid Karzai announced that there would be a second round of the elections, held in about two and a half weeks. (IEC likely will delay final signature on its certification of first-round results until October 26, so that the constitutionally stipulated 14 days will fall on the announced date of November 7.) He shared the dais with Senator John Kerry and UNAMA SRSG Eide, after prolonged negotiations which delayed the press conference more than three hours. President Karzai called the first round of the elections a national success and urged even more Afghans to vote in the second round. Preparations for a second round have been underway at the IEC and ISAF for some time and earlier today the Minister of Interior issued an order to his staff to begin preparations for a run-off. End Summary.

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The Press Conference and the Press Release  
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¶2. (C) Over three hours later than initially scheduled and after intense closed-door negotiations with Ambassador Eikenberry, Senator Kerry, and members of his cabinet and Palace staff, President Karzai made his public announcement accepting the need for a second round of elections. He was flanked by Eide and Kerry, and the U.S., French and British Ambassadors. Karzai's statement was very positive in his call for increased voter turnout and his characterization of the runoff as an "opportunity" to strengthen the democracy and Afghanistan's constitution.

¶3. (U) At the press conference, President Karzai said that he had won in numerous provinces but also pointed out that Abdullah and Bashardost had also gotten majorities in more than one province. He referred to Ashraf Ghani's campaign in an approving manner as well and expressed pleasure at how positive it was that he and his rivals could list so many different places across the country where they had each won majorities. He never said that he had gotten less than 50 percent of the vote saying "no one knows who the real winner is, only the Afghan people know who the winner is." He spoke only about how there would be a second round and saying that he was proud of Afghans for their participation in the previous election and in this run-off. He emphatically asked the international community to provide better security.

¶4. (U) Following Karzai's remarks, Senator Kerry emphasized the importance of the rule of law and good governance in the future as well as looking forward to stronger relations. SRSG Eide emphasized the importance of the process and following the laws and procedures as written. Both praised the courage of the Afghan people for turning out to vote. In the short question/answer session that followed, Kerry and Karzai had the opportunity to deny, categorically, that there was any "deal" or prearranged coalition government, although Karzai said that the future government should represent "national unity."

¶5. (U) The IEC's statement, publicly released during the

press conference, noted that according to their organization's calculations Karzai was only 0.4 percent under the required majority while the ECC decisions put Karzai more than 3 percent under. The IEC also said in their statement that they had "doubts" about the ECC decision but would be proceeding in the "interests of the country."

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The Back Room: Delays and Deceit  
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¶16. (S) Karzai held meetings at 10:00 with Afghan Jihadi leaders and at 11:00 with around 200 MP's. According to one MP who attended both meetings, Karzai told the group he was accepting a second round verdict and asked for their approval. The leaders told him that he had to actually have the runoff election to be seen as legitimate according to Afghan law. The MP's reportedly applauded Karzai at the end of their meeting.

¶17. (S) When Kerry arrived at the Palace around 12:15, with a final meeting with Karzai, a lunch, and a 1:45 pm press conference scheduled, we learned that Karzai was planning to announce that he accepted a second round but that the IEC was going to then announce that he had obtained over 50 percent of the vote, according to their own calculations. This would have established a conflict between his "forced" statement witnessed by superpowers and the "real" findings of the Afghan election institution. Refusing to appear at the press event until this was resolved, Kerry and Ambassador Eikenberry spent several hours with Karzai and his key advisors making it clear that the IEC's certification

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statement had to precede the press event. IEC chairman Ludin was then summoned. In a moment of comedy in an otherwise tense afternoon, Ludin first said it would take hours or days to run his numbers and issue a certification, but then responded to a direct order to do it by saying simply "I'll have it finished 15 minutes after I get to my office."

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Second Round Planning  
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¶18. (S) The Ministry of Interior today began planning for a second round. After holding out in recent weeks, most recently saying that preparations for a second round "would send the wrong signal," Minister Atmar today ordered that his Ministry staff begin examining the contingencies for a second round. ISAF has said repeatedly that it is ready for a second round and has begun planning to transport materials and provide security. ISAF will be able to airlift a significantly larger portion of the materials to and from polling centers than before due to the reduced volume and weight of materials in this round. The IEC already has the indelible finger ink, ballots for Karzai and Abdullah, and polling kits in its possession. It will print flipcharts for training election workers locally, which will take only three days.

¶19. (S) The IEC is discussing plans to fire poll workers for whom there is clear and convincing evidence of participation in fraud. For those poll workers about whom there are questions but no convincing evidence, they will be moved to a different work location for the second round. Most poll workers are expected to return to work in the second round, including female poll workers. However, the IEC is planning to eliminate those locations that were not secured in the first round or for which there was clear and convincing evidence of fraud perpetrated.

¶10. (S) Comment: We now are focused on supporting second round preparations and on helping to improve systems that need more attention, especially security and fraud prevention. Both the Abdullah and Karzai camps have given us

the same message today: please make the second round work, and please keep away from any political dialogue or negotiations in the coming days. We will do so, as the two sides analyze the positive and negative sides for them of actually competing in the second round versus a national unity deal. The risk of a deal is the optic of the corrupt, stalemated governments of the early 1990's, but there is likely to be significant discussion -- an early indication of this is that Abdullah, only hours after the press conference, reached out to Karzai with a phone call of appreciation for Karzai's positive message. We may recommend changing our "hands-off" approach as conditions shift but for now, will focus on election preparation and a positive message of ongoing and enhanced U.S. engagement with Afghanistan. End comment.

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